

PURSE SEINER SHENANDOAH
Gig Harbor Peninsula Historical Society and Museum
Gig Harbor
Pierce
Washington

HAER WA-178
WA-178

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

PURSE SEINER SHENANDOAH

HAER No. WA-178

Location: Harbor History Museum
Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington

Date of Construction: 1925

Official Number: 224606

Rig/Type of Craft: Purse Seiner

Trade: Fishing

Builder: Skansie Ship Building Company

Present Owner: Harbor History Museum

Present Use: Museum Exhibit

Significance: The Purse Seiner Shenandoah is a classic example of a wood-hulled Puget Sound purse seiner from the early to mid-twentieth century. She is one of the last of the Gig Harbor-built purse seiners and one of only two Skansie-built fishing vessels still remaining in the harbor. Her legacy is rich with the heritage of the men who skippered these timeless vessels, of the commercial fishing industry that supported the growing community, and of the carpenters and shipwrights who built innovation and beauty into every vessel launched.

Historian: Victoria Blackwell, Curator of Harbor History Museum; and Michael Vlahovich, Director of Coastal Heritage Alliance

Project Information: The project was sponsored by the Harbor History Museum (HHM) through the Coastal Heritage Alliance (CHA) in 2006. Mike Vlahovich, CHA Director, coordinated the project. Todd Croteau, HAER Maritime Program Coordinator, prepared drawings and large-format photographs. Victoria Blackwell, HHM Curator, prepared the title sheet and the historical narrative with description provided by Mike Vlahovich and edited by HAER historian Justine Christianson.

INTRODUCTION

The Purse Seiner SHENANDOAH is a classic example of a wood-hulled Puget Sound purse seiner from the early to mid-twentieth century. She is one of the last of the Gig Harbor-built purse seiners and one of only two Skansie-built fishing vessels still remaining in the harbor. Her legacy is rich with the heritage of the men who skippered these timeless vessels, of the commercial fishing industry that supported the growing community, and of the carpenters and shipwrights who built innovation and beauty into every vessel launched.

DESCRIPTION

The F/V SHENANDOAH is a 64-foot salmon purse seine vessel of classic design and traditional west coast wood construction. She is a displacement hull with round bilges, plumb stem, straight keel, and an elliptical horseshoe stern. She is presently rigged as a drum seiner for use in the Puget Sound region. Her deck house is located forward of amidships with raised forward and side decks. The main working deck runs with the sheer from the back of the cabin to the stern. A flying bridge is located atop the deck house with a helm station.

The vessel is laid out as follows:

Main Deck Arrangement

Forward most on the bulwark is mounted the anchor and anchor chock. Aft on center is the anchor winch. To starboard, is an escape hatch/companion way to access the foc'sle. Aft is the deck house with side decks leading to the main working deck. On the starboard side is an access door to the main cabin and access below decks to the engine room. Also on starboard, is a ladder to access the fly bridge. Aft of the cabin is the main working deck with the mast and boom assembly mounted on center, galley access door to port, and marine head compartment to port. To port and starboard, on the bulwarks, are mounted purse davits. On center, aft of the mast, is the purse winch; aft is the fish hold; aft is the aluminum seine drum; aft at the stern is an aluminum roller and fair lead assembly. The original seine net table was replaced with a drum type.

Main Cabin Arrangement

Forward is the wheel house with helm station and electronics. To starboard is an access door the side deck. Aft of the wheel house is a corridor which serves as a stateroom with double berth and access to the galley. Aft is the galley with dinette to port and counter top, sink, and storage to starboard. A diesel cook stove is located along the aft bulkhead. Access to below decks and exit to the side deck are on starboard and exit to main deck is along the aft bulkhead to port.

Bridge Deck Arrangement

The bridge deck consists of a forward helm station with a bench seat. Aft is a radar stand and the main engine exhaust cowling. To starboard is a pipe ladder to the access the side deck and storage boxes are located aft and port.

Below Deck Arrangement

Forward is a fore peak compartment with access door. Aft are four single berths (two to port; two to starboard). To port is a workbench, hanging locker and storage compartments. To port are two single bunks (one upper and one lower); aft is a ladder leading to the main cabin and the starboard side deck. Aft is the engine room with the main engine on center, fuel tanks port and starboard, and the main battery bank on starboard. Aft to port is an access door to the dry fish hold. Aft is the lazarette with rudder port and steering gear. Aft is the stern.

VESSEL PARTICULARS

Rig/Type of Craft: Purse Seiner

Length: 65'

Trade: Fishing (Salmon)

Beam: 15.4'

Official Number: 224606

Depth: 7.3'

Net Tons: 32 / Gross Tons: 47

Hull

Planking and Decking – 1/3/4" Fir

Frames – 2-1/2"x3" Oak

Beams – 5-1/2"x4" Fir

Bulkheads – Tongue and Groove Fir; Plywood

Guards – Ironbark

Propulsion

Detroit Diesel

Model 12V-71

300 Horsepower

12 Cylinders

1800 R.P.M.

Diesel Fuel

Keel Cooled

Dry Exhaust

Reduction Gear: Twin Disc MG 514; 3.5:1 ratio

Propeller: 51" x 40"; five blade bronze

Steering: Hydraulic with steel rudder

GIG HARBOR'S COMMERCIAL FISHING FLEET

For more than 100 years, the commercial fishing industry determined the rhythm of life in the small Puget Sound town of Gig Harbor, Washington. Fishermen and their families forged a legacy still visible today along the historic waterfront, from supporting local merchants, sawmills and boatyards to building schools, churches, and community halls.

Commercial fishing in Gig Harbor dates back to the first white settler, Samuel Jerisich. Originally from Montenegro, Sam arrived in the harbor with his family in 1867 from British Columbia, Canada. A fisherman by trade, Sam soon began rowing across the treacherous Narrows waterway to Steilacoom to sell his dogfish oil. Word of the abundant fish in the waters of the Pacific Northwest spread to Sam's homeland and soon more countrymen joined him. Many became fishermen, either following in their family's heritage or beginning a new occupation in a new land.

In the early days, fishermen worked from shore or from an oar-powered seiner. They sometimes traveled far in search of their catch. Some hired tugboats to tow a group of their boats to fishing grounds around the San Juan Islands or other choice locations. About 1905, fishermen began using gasoline engine-powered boats. It was a change that came about out of a desire to stay abreast of, or ahead of, the competition. Over the years, improvements in equipment continued, helping establish Gig Harbor fishermen as formidable competitors in Puget Sound.

Gig Harbor's commercial fishing fleet eventually became one of the largest and most successful on the West Coast, earning millions of dollars and supplying fish to local canneries for worldwide distribution. The successes peaked in the 1940s and early 1950s as fishing boats grew in size along with major innovations in the industry. The Boldt Decision of 1974, upholding treaty fishing rights for Puget Sound Native Americans, drastically curtailed the fish quotas for area commercial fishermen, signaling the end of an era for commercial fishing. Today, Gig Harbor's fleet continues its fishing tradition established more than 100 years ago and remains a vibrant part of the harbor and its economy.

HISTORY OF SHENANDOAH

SHENANDOAH slid down the ways of the Skansie Ship Building Company and into Gig Harbor in winter 1925. A classic purse seiner design, she was one of the early vessels in Gig Harbor's growing commercial fishing fleet. She was built for Pasco Dorotich, a pioneer Gig Harbor fishing boat owner and skipper.

SHENANDOAH operated almost exclusively at the Salmon Banks in the San Juan Islands of Washington State. In her early days, she also ventured on several occasions to the rich fishing waters off the coast of Alaska.

Pasco's son, John, took over the operation of the vessel in the 1930s. Like his father, John was an extremely successful skipper. From the first fish hauled aboard her deck, the SHENANDOAH was continually operated by a top-producing skipper.

Tony Janovich purchased the fishing boat from the Dorotich estate in 1967. The Janovich family had been active in the commercial fishing industry for more than eighty-five years, beginning in 1915 with Tony's father, Spiro. In later years, SHENANDOAH became a true family fishing operation, with Tony's wife, daughter and brother all taking part onboard.

SHENANDOAH was modified over the years, reflecting changes in the fishing industry. The original Atlas Imperial diesel engine was replaced in 1947 by a more powerful Atlas. A larger pilothouse was fitted to the deck in 1948 and new bulwarks were added a few years later. In later years, the engine was replaced again, and the vessel was converted to a drum seiner.

Tony operated the vessel for thirty-two years until his retirement in 2000, after fifty-eight years in the commercial fishing industry. That same year, he gifted SHENANDOAH to the Harbor History Museum, where it will be placed on exhibit, restored and preserved.

HISTORY OF BOAT BUILDING IN GIG HARBOR AND SKANSIE SHIP BUILDING COMPANY

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a number of entrepreneurs recognized in Gig Harbor the opportunity for a boat building industry. The bay offered a protected harbor and easy access to materials.

The earliest known efforts to establish a boat building industry date to the late 1800s. A group of entrepreneurs from Albert Lea, Minnesota were operating a sawmill on the west shore of Gig Harbor. In 1890, the mill's owner won a boat building contract to build a schooner, the VINE. Intended as a pleasure boat, the ship was doing service as a lumber transport within a year. Another vessel, the steamer ALBERT LEA, was built in Gig Harbor around this time.

It was in the 1910s that local ship building began to take off. More than 140 wooden boats were built in Gig Harbor between 1912 and 1931 at three shipyards: Skansie Ship Building Company, Robert Crawford Shipyard, and Anderson and Son's. The majority of the vessels were purse seiners built for fishermen. Other craft included steamboats, ferries, fire barges, tug boats, and pleasure craft.

Skansie Ship Building Company was by far the most successful, building more than 100 vessels in a twenty-year period, including Purse Seiner SHENANDOAH launched in 1925. Mitchell, Joe, Andrew and Peter Skansie emigrated from Dalmatia to Gig Harbor at the turn of the century. They established Skansie Brothers' Shipyard in 1910. Shortly after, Mitchell and Joe changed the name of the yard to Skansie's Ship Building Company. Joe worked in the shipyard for a while but eventually became a ferry operator. Peter and Andrew went on to become successful commercial fishermen, leaving Mitchell as sole operator of the shipyard.

For the first two years, Skansie finished hulls purchased from the Martinolich yard in Dockton, on Puget Sound's Maury Island. Skansie added pilothouses and rigged the boats for purse seining. The Skansie name on a boat was known for quality.

In 1912, the shipyard built OCEANIA, a purse seiner, from the keel up. Between 1912 and 1949, the company constructed ninety-six seiners as well as several ferries, cannery tenders, and yachts. The seiners made up a significant portion of the west coast fishing fleet. Skansie built one of the first gasoline launches for seine fishing when most fishermen were still using oars and pulling nets by hand.

In addition to his successful shipyard, Mitchell founded the Washington Navigation Company to build and run car ferries across the Sound. Mitchell would eventually build and run five boats: DEFIANCE, SKANSONIA, CITY OF STEILACOOM, FOX ISLAND, and VASHONIA.

The Great Depression brought an end to most of the commercial boat building in the harbor. Mitchell died in 1939 and his son Bill succeeded him as owner of the shipyard. During World War II, Bill leased the yard to another boat builder. The yard was renamed Gig Harbor Ship Company and produced military vessels, including tub boats and fire barges.

After the war, the facility was used primarily for haul-out and repair. Bill sold the shipyard in 1959. The yard changed owners three times during the next seven years. A section of the original building was torn down in 1994, but the rest remains standing.

In the late 1940s, there was a rebirth of boat building in the harbor for small vessels, mostly pleasure craft. Art Glein built wooden boats on the former site of Anderson and Son's. From the 1950s through the 1970s, Eddon Boat Company occupied the same site.

Ed Hoppen, owner of Eddon Boat Company, built wooden boats, mostly pleasure craft, and is remembered for his Thunderbird sailboat, co-designed with naval architect Ben Seaborn. Still sailed on local and international waters today, the 26' Thunderbird was the result of a sailboat design competition by the American Plywood Association. The first Thunderbird was launched at Eddon Boat Company in November 1958. Hull No. 1 was donated to the Harbor History Museum by Ed's son, Guy, in 2003. Boat building craftsmen still make the harbor their home, creating canoes, skiffs and other small craft.